

VZCZCXRO9395
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #1360/01 1801057
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 291057Z JUN 07
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8230
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001360

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/29/2017
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SUBJECT: HUSSAYN AL-SHAYKH: SECURITY FIRST PRIORITY

Classified By: Consul General Jacob Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Begin Summary. On June 28, Fatah grassroots leader Hussayn al-Shaykh told PolChief that he supports the new government and the appointment of Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister. He urged an immediate re-examination of the entire security apparatus, claiming that West Bank PA security forces (PASF) are weaker than those in Gaza. While praising PA President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen)'s leadership, al-Shaykh also encouraged the President to be more decisive on security and suggested he should replace all of the PASF chiefs. Al-Shaykh said internal Fatah elections are out of the question during the current "emergency," and he will not work with NDI on Fatah reform. End Summary.

Al-Shaykh's New Position

¶2. (C) PA President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) issued a decree naming al-Shaykh director of Civil Affairs, responsible for all civilian liaison with the GoI. Al-Shaykh said he reports directly to Abu Mazen, not the Minister of Interior, in this capacity. Al-Shaykh was joined in his new office by Gaza Fatah leader Samir Mashrawi. (Note: During the eighteen months after the PLC election, much of the civil affairs work, including VIP permits, was handled by PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat, because the GoI would not deal with the PA. End Comment)

Support for New Government

¶3. (C) Al-Shaykh said he will support the new government and predicted that newly-appointed PM Salam Fayyad will be the most successful Prime Minister in the history of the PA. He applauded Fayyad's boldness and seriousness about confronting Hamas. Al-Shaykh said the Presidential decree exempting Gazans from paying taxes bolstered Gazans' support for Fayyad. He said he expects Fayyad's popularity to increase as soon as salaries are paid, and even more "in a few months, when Fayyad's steps forward start bearing fruit."

Security is Top Priority: Reigning in
the Militias, Coordinating with the Israelis

¶4. (C) While applauding Abu Mazen's decision to form a committee to investigate events in Gaza, al-Shaykh urged a re-examination of the security apparatus. He said only some PASF elements; e.g., General Intelligence and PSO, engaged Hamas during the clashes, and others; e.g., Presidential Guard and National Security Forces did not fight. Al-Shaykh expressed doubt that the West Bank PASF can confront Hamas, given Hamas' local, regional and international support. "Fatah security in Gaza was much better off than in the West Bank and look what happened. Thirty Hamas gunmen could take

over the West Bank in seconds," said al-Shaykh. He suggested Abu Mazen replace all the security chiefs and expand Fayyad's role in security.

¶5. (C) Al-Shaykh said West Bank security requires bringing all the militias under the legitimate authority and said he is calling on the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades to rejoin the PASF. He said West Bank security also requires help from Israel and success is contingent on an end to IDF incursions into the West Bank. He expressed concern about the ongoing operation in Nablus (septel). Al-Shaykh noted that he had advised Abu Mazen to form a steering committee with representatives of all PA ministries to coordinate with the GoI. (Comment: Al-Shaykh proposed that he lead this committee. He is already angling to expand his new responsibilities, but his authority is unlikely to expand into the security realm, because it would undermine the PM's effort to empower the MoI. End comment).

Going After Hamas

¶5. (C) Al-Shaykh praised Abu Mazen's decree mandating all NGOs to re-register with the MoI. He said that is critical to confront Hamas' network of charitable societies. He also urged Abu Mazen to be more decisive on security matters, saying the President can no longer afford to be a "centrist" and sit on the fence. Al-Shaykh stressed that Abu Mazen must view the situation in Gaza as an opportunity to suffocate Hamas and restore Fatah's legitimacy. It is clear that Hamas had support from the outside, including from Khalid Misha'al and Ahmadinejad, he stated. "Hamas entered into a trap. They made great military accomplishments but in time, there will be heavy losses. There is no room for maneuvering,"

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said al-Shaykh. Al-Shaykh praised Abu Mazen for rejecting Saudi Arabia and Egypt's call for dialogue between Palestinian factions and warned that Abu Mazen must not back away from this stance.

Fatah Internal Elections Out of the Question for Now

¶6. (C) Al-Shaykh said internal Fatah elections are out of the question in the current situation. He encouraged a re-evaluation of Fatah but stressed that the challenge is not only fixing Fatah but repairing the entire democratic current of the West Bank. Al-Shaykh said the focus on Fatah is now a second-order priority, but said Fatah continues to need a new strategy. (Comment: Al-Shaykh was previously leading the charge for Fatah reform, but is cynical about this effort for now. End comment).

¶7. (C) Al-Shaykh said he will no longer work with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on Fatah reform. (Note: As Chair of the West Bank Field Committee, al-Shaykh signed an agreement with NDI for training. End Note). He reiterated his concerns that NDI had sought to mediate between himself and other Fatah leaders and that NDI is too close to Abu Ala'a. He said "NDI can work with Abu Ala'a. I won't work with them." Asked by PolChief if there is no USG assistance or NDI training that al-Shaykh and Fatah could benefit from, al-Shaykh said no. He added that Fatah was criticized during the clashes in Gaza for being supported by the U.S., but, in fact, had received little tangible support.

WALLES